

RELEASE IN PART  
B6

**From:** Anne-Marie Slaughter [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Sunday, September 16, 2012 2:34 PM  
**To:** H  
**Cc:** Abedin, Huma; Cheryl Mills; Jacob J Sullivan (SullivanJJ@state.gov)  
**Subject:** an interesting and valuable piece on "emerging civic rule" in Syria

B6

You have been in my thoughts all week.

This is from Reuters

By Khaled Yacoub Oweis  
 AMMAN | Sun Sep 16, 2012 1:54pm EDT

**(Reuters) - Until Syrian forces stormed the Damascus suburb of Daraya last month, rebels ran the affairs of the working class town in a display of grassroots unity which has eluded President Bashar al-Assad's opponents on a national level.**

The nascent self-rule in Daraya mirrored arrangements in towns across Syria, particularly northern rural districts, which have fallen out of Assad's control during the 18-month uprising.

"Independent judges presided over the court and rebels took over police duties," said Saleh Nasser, an underground activist who helped set up a civilian administration alongside the rebels to oversee security and municipal services. "Daraya threatened to become a model of a civilized alternative to Assad."

That local coordination, built around a rebel move away from tight, small fighting cells into bigger units in towns and cities, has failed to translate into an organizational structure offering a national alternative to Assad's rule, according to opposition leaders and diplomats following the revolt.

But with the divided opposition in exile failing to secure international recognition and some rebel-held towns gaining a degree of autonomy, Western powers are paying increasing attention to the rebel leaders on the ground.

Local groups with names such as 'Revolution Command Council' are mostly composed of armed rebels and civilian figures such as professors, doctors and lawyers who were at the forefront of the street protest movement before it turned into an armed revolt.

These grassroots organizations, diplomats who follow the rebellion say, are more cohesive than military groupings set up by army officers who defected and fled to Turkey or Jordan, such as a recently announced 'National Army' headed by General Mohammad Haj Ali, the most senior military officer to defect.

The revolt against Assad began in March last year as mainly peaceful demonstrations for reform. Protests rapidly hardened into calls for Assad's overthrow and, faced with a violent military crackdown, the uprising became an armed insurgency. Syrian authorities say they are fighting Islamist "terrorists" backed by western and Sunni Arab nations for geopolitical gain.

#### OUTSIDERS HAVE LITTLE INFLUENCE

A Western diplomat who has monitored the growing militarization of the revolt said military officers outside Syria such as Ali and Manaf Tlas - a former Assad confidante and a brigadier general in the Republican Guards who defected in July - have no substantial influence over the rebels.

"Tlas' defection came too little too late. Fighters tend not to have much respect for officers sitting in exile who seem to be more interested in self-promotion," the diplomat said.

"People also do not want another dictator from the army."

Instead, the disparate rebels groups inside the country have gradually improved their own coordination, as shown by recent simultaneous attacks on military airports.

"It is going slowly. The likely scenario is that the organization of the opposition on the inside will keep improving and just before the regime collapses it may manage to sit together in a sort of a national conference to prevent the country falling into fiefdoms," the diplomat said.

Fawaz Tello, a veteran opposition campaigner, said it was too late to establish a unified command for the revolt and the nearest that could be hoped for was tighter coordination between the different forces.

Tello, who is well connected with rebels in Damascus, said a loose structure was emerging across the country under which rebels form councils with civilian liaison officers and coordinate within larger groups.

"Let's stop kidding ourselves. Ask any politician to give you a political and military map of the forces on the ground. Impossible. These groups are changing and militant and are affected by changing sources of financing," he said.

Speaking from Berlin, Tello said that countries playing a role in financing the revolt, or acting as a conduit for weapons, such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, could play a larger role in bringing the opposition on the inside together.

"We cannot continue to have anyone going to the Saudis or Qataris and getting a few million dollars and forming his own group and buy allegiances," he said.

#### AVOIDING ISLAMISATION

Afaq Ahmad, an intelligence operative who defected from Air Force Intelligence, said the emergence of a powerful general to lead the revolt was unlikely because Assad had sidelined army officers from the Sunni Muslim majority.

The opposition, he said, should focus on attracting professional officers from Assad's Alawite sect, who dominate the armed forces and who may be unhappy with the crackdown on the revolt but wary of its increasing Islamisation.

"The opposition has to project itself as a national movement and not allow the Islamists to hijack it," he said.

Both the rebel brigades and their affiliated civilian units have fallen increasingly under the influence of Islamists, who are supported by Arab jihadists finding their way to Syria.

In Damascus, two Islamist-leaning federations of rebel organisations with civilian membership have emerged: Ansar al-Islam and the smaller Tahrir al-Sham. But they lack a single leader and decisions are taken by consensus, according to opposition activists helping streamline the resistance.

Rebels in Douma, a conservative suburb northeast of Damascus, have refused to join the new groupings. They are led by a charismatic cleric, Abu Suleiman Taffour.

To the north, in Idlib province, rebels have agreed with local organisations in several towns to stay out of civic life and enforce the decisions of committees comprised of elders and activists in each town, according to Sameh al-Hamwi, a leading opposition campaigner who recently toured Idlib.

He said that in towns such as Khan al-Sibil and Binnig, rebels avoid carrying weapons in the streets and are mostly based in compounds on the outskirts. A civic administration is fixing power lines damaged by army shelling.

Hamwi said Assad was trying to crush those signs of emerging civic rule.

"The army does not have the troops on the ground to enter these towns, so it is shelling them," he said, adding that in his own city of Hama, army roadblocks had been set up every 500 metres to prevent the establishment of a local administration.

Daraya, the district on the outskirts of Damascus, was fiercely targeted partly because of the success of its attempt at self-rule so close to Assad's seat of power, according to opposition campaigners.

They said the attack last month, by mostly Alawite Republican Guards on the Sunni town, killed at least 700 people and that many of those killed were summarily executed.

(Editing by Dominic Evans and Philippa Fletcher)

Anne-Marie Slaughter  
 Bert G. Kerstetter '66 University Professor of Politics and International Affairs  
 Princeton University

440 Robertson Hall  
Princeton, NJ 08544

Assistant: Terry Murphy

Website: [www.princeton.edu/~slaughtr](http://www.princeton.edu/~slaughtr)

B6